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Reports 'Some ID' on Captives

Gritz Says He's on New POW Mission in Laos

By BOB SECTER, Times Staff Writer

BANGKOK, Thailand—Retired Green Beret Lt. Col. James G. (Bo) Gritz has told The Times that he is deep in the Laotian jungle on a new mission to rescue American prisoners of war. He said that he has come up with "some POW ID" but that he cannot confirm its authenticity.

In a handwritten message from across the Mekong River, Gritz said that another of his Laotian guerrillas has been killed—the second in as many missions. But he insisted that he will press his search for U.S. prisoners from the Vietnam War until he can tell the nation whether any Americans are being held in Laos.

"If Americans are here," he wrote, "by God, let's find out."

Expertise in Weaponry

Gritz, 44, a Vietnam veteran from Westchester, Calif., disclosed his whereabouts in a 12-page letter dated Feb. 12 that was brought from Laos by runner. It arrived last week and was hand-delivered to The Times on Saturday by a Gritz associate. The letter was signed by Gritz and the two other Americans who are with him in Laos.

One is David Scott Weekly, 35, of Encinitas, Calif., a Vietnam War-era Navy airman with an expertise in weaponry that earned him the nickname Dr. Death. The other is Gary Goldman, 38, of Encino, Calif., described by friends as a soldier of fortune trained in anti-terrorism techniques.

State Department officials in Washington oppose Gritz's rescue missions. They say such raids could place any living American prisoners

in jeopardy at the hands of their captors, might get in the way of any official rescue efforts that are using far better resources, and could harm improving U.S.-Laotian relations, which are the key to obtaining information about missing Americans.

"I have some POW ID," Gritz said in his letter. "But until I can personally confirm it, it will not be reported."

He said he had sent anti-communist Lao agents to possible prison sites with letters for any POWs to sign and to fill out, if possible, with "other dossier info to ID them." Gritz said one agent carried a camera.

But Gritz said nothing more about the matter. He did not make it clear whether the "POW ID" he claimed to possess was such a letter-dossier, a photograph or something else. And he did not indicate whether it was from a living prisoner or a military man long dead.

"This report is being hastily written from a jungle location deep in central Laos and will hopefully be delivered by messenger to you ASAP," Gritz wrote, disclosing for the first time where he has been since he returned to Southeast Asia in January. He said he was at a "northern location," apparently well above the Thai border town of Nakhon Phanom, on the banks of the Mekong River.

In his message, Gritz also:

—Hinted that he might go into Vietnam. Describing the validity of his travel papers, he added cryptically, "The only thing that has happened is that we don't have a visa for VN (Vietnam). But then, we don't have any diplomatic relations with them, either."

—Unfortunately, travel through Laos is a necessity, which I'm sure the U.S. presence in Vientiane (the Laotian capital) is—was—aware of. If not, it wasn't because we didn't inform embassy sources."

—Declared flatly for the first time that the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency are aware of his plans.

'Knew of Our ID'

Gritz wrote, "I have 12 CIA-DIA generated targets which, through agent reports and other verification, could hold U.S. POWs. . . . CIA-DIA knew of our ID, acquisition and test of state-of-the-art secure Alpha numeric-graphic code burst devices, night vision goggles, night vision cameras, etc. Some special equipment was furnished. Ask Rusty Capps, FBI-LA."

(At the FBI's Los Angeles field office, spokesman John Hoos said it was impossible to talk to Capps. "You won't get to him," Hoos told a reporter. "We won't even make a comment on that.")

(Rear Adm. Allan G. Paulson, in charge of intelligence collection for the DIA, said in Washington, "The government has no association whatever with Gritz." When asked if that included government people acting individually, Paulson replied, "It certainly does, as far as I'm concerned.")

(At the CIA, spokesman Levon Strong said, "We will have no comment on that wild allegation.")

—Denied breaking any laws. "We have (I have) never intended or conspired or acted outside the laws of the United States," Gritz said. "I did not organize (Operation) Lazarus as a vigilante effort. . . . I have always been dedicated to keeping the laws of our country. I do not espouse or encourage vigilantism."

In Washington, the Justice Department is reviewing information about Gritz's missions to determine whether they violate a federal law that bans any private military "expedition or enterprise" against such countries as Laos, with which the United State is at peace.

As for Thai laws, Gritz said twice in his letter that he brought no weapons into Thailand to use on his raids into Laos. "We have all the munitions needed in-country," Gritz said. The Thais have denounced Gritz's rescue efforts and have said that they will try to arrest him.

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